DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 479 772 CS 512 092

TITLE	American Colonial Life in the Late 1700s: Distant Cousins. [Lesson Plan].
SPONS AGENCY	Council of the Great City Schools, Washington, DC.; MCI WorldCom, Arlington, VA.; National Endowment for the Humanities (NFAH), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2002-07-16
NOTE	10p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson_index.asp.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Class Activities; *Colonial History (United States); Curriculum Enrichment; *Family Life; Intermediate Grades; Learning Activities; Lesson Plans; Primary Sources; Skill Development; Standards; Student Educational Objectives; *Student Research; *Writing Assignments
IDENTIFIERS	*Delaware; Eighteenth Century; Historical Fiction; *Massachusetts; Standards for the English Language Arts

ABSTRACT

In this lesson, students will explore daily life in the 13 original British colonies and its influences in the late 1700s for two families in different colonies--Delaware and Massachusetts. The lesson asks students to become historical detectives and learn to gather information from artifacts and make inferences about the lives and time they represent--they will then use what they have learned to write historical fiction in the form of letters between fictitious cousins in Massachusetts and Delaware. The lesson: provides an introduction; cites grade level, time required, subject areas, and skills developed; poses guiding questions; gives learning objectives; offers suggestions on preparing to teach this lesson; outlines suggested activities (1. Defining the British Colonies; 2. Investigating Life in Early America; 3. Dear Cousin); suggests ways to extend the lesson; lists selected Web sites; and addresses standards alignment. (NKA)

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CS 512 092

American Colonial Life in the Late 1700s: Distant Cousins

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES
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marcopolo

GRADES 3-5

Introduction

Life in the thirteen original British colonies was very different than it is today. In this lesson, students will explore daily life and its influences in the late 1700s for two families in different colonies—Delaware and Massachusetts. Students will become historical detectives and learn to gather information from artifacts and make inferences about the lives and times they represent. They will then use what they have learned to write historical fiction in the form of friendly letters between fictitious cousins in Massachusetts and Delaware.

Guiding Question:

What was life like for people living in the original thirteen British colonies during the late 1700s? How and why did life differ for families in different areas? How did life in the colonies influence the lives we lead today?

Learning Objectives

After completing these activities, students will be able to:

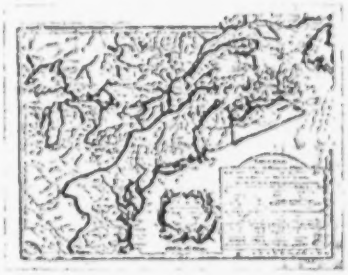
- Identify the original thirteen British colonies on a map
- Understand how physical geography affected settlement
- Understand how settlers' backgrounds influenced their values, priorities, and daily lives
- Examine artifacts and make inferences about the people and the historical periods that they represent
- Imagine typical daily life for different families in colonial America in the late 1700s
- Write a letter from the viewpoint of someone who lived in a different time and place

Preparing to Teach this Lesson

First, read the entire lesson to get a sense of the content involved. You should be familiar with core facts about colonial life in various regions. See key ideas listed within individual activities below. Review the Web sites embedded in the activities.

For profiles of colonial life in different regions, go to History Topics/Historical Periods/Colonial America, available through EDSITEment-reviewed resource My History is America's History, and read background information about New England, Middle Colonies, and Chesapeake Colonies. You may also want to read about Colonial Culture, Colonial Economy, and Colonial Government and Politics.

Any other resources you have available related to colonial life might offer additional information for you or your students.



North America, 1756
Courtesy of American Memory Collection.

Subject Areas
History and Social Studies
U.S. History - Colonial America and the New Nation

Time Required
1: One class period
2: One to two class periods
3: One to two class periods

Skills
Listening
Speaking
Investigating
Observing and describing
Interpreting written, oral, and visual information
Comparing and contrasting
Making inferences
Thinking critically
Representing ideas and information orally, graphically, and in writing
Working collaboratively

Additional Data
Date Created: 07/16/02

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Make copies of maps, worksheets, and any other resources you will distribute to students.

Suggested Activities

1. Defining the British Colonies

Distribute to all students a blank map of the United States. Ask students to label the thirteen original English colonies in pencil to the best of their knowledge. If you need a blank U.S. map, you can print one from the EDSITEment-reviewed resource National Geographic Xpeditions. In the Atlas, select "United States of America" and choose "Basic" to get a blank map of the U.S. today.

After students have attempted to label the colonies, show them a map of the U.S. colonies and territories in 1775. You can find such a U.S. Territorial Map 1775, available through the EDSITEment-reviewed resource American Studies at UVA. You can either project or distribute this map.

Ask students to correctly label their maps with the names of the 13 original English colonies in ink. Then ask them to color three different colonial regions in different colors using colored pencils: New England, Middle Colonies, and Southern Colonies. They should also make a key, which includes a list of colonies in each region (see below).

Key:

New England—Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island (Vermont and Maine came later) Middle Colonies—New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware Southern Colonies—Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia

Students should also trace the lines of the Mississippi River and the Ohio River. Then they should shade in the section between the original colonies and the Mississippi, and label this region "British Territories." They should shade the part of the country west of the Mississippi with another color or marking and label it "Other Territories." Finally, they should label the map "The British Colonies in 1775."

Once they have finished, discuss as a class the significance of physical geography in the late 1700s, when colonists were settling the area that is now the United States. Some ideas to address in the discussion might include the following:

- Settlements needed to be near waterways because boats were the most practical way to transport cargo. In particular, access to the Atlantic Ocean was crucial at the time, as trade with Britain, the rest of Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa was essential to the colonial American economy.
- Geographical barriers such as rivers and mountains limited settlement because transportation technology was much less developed than it is now.
- Climate and geography had a major impact on the crops that settlers could grow for food and for trade. Tobacco, imported from Trinidad in 1612, became an important export crop for the Southern Colonies, where it grew particularly well. In addition, other crops such as corn and wheat grew well throughout the colonies. Fishing developed as an important industry, especially in New England, where ocean geography offered ideal conditions for abundant fish populations. About 4/5 of the colonial population were farmers. Approximately ¼ of the colonial population were slaves, brought to the colonies against their will from Africa in the triangular trade system,* in which European manufactured commodities were traded for slaves in Africa, who were then traded for agricultural commodities such as sugar, cotton, and tobacco to be taken to back to Europe and the colonies.
- All land was taken from Native Americans, either peacefully or forcefully. Native American friendliness was the only way that the initial colonies survived. Native American communities did not have the same sense of land ownership that Europeans had; they shared the land they occupied rather than staking a claim. Thus, there was a major cultural difference between the Europeans and the Native Americans, which resulted in major displacements of the latter.

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Next, discuss with students what was going on during that period in American history. Some ideas to address in the discussion might include the following:

- People came to the colonies for different reasons, such as seeking freedom from religious persecution, seeking fortune, or being kidnapped and enslaved. Naturally, their reasons for coming and their backgrounds had an impact on their values and priorities.
- Life was very different in the various colonies. For example, slaves, who were an important part of the economic system, made up about 40% of the population in the Southern colonies at that time, while they were less common in the Northern Colonies. Agriculture was the primary industry in most colonies, but almost universally in the South. In New England, government was organized around town councils, whereas the Middle and Southern Colonies generally tended to organize their governments around counties. (This is still true.) Desire for religious freedom was a major incentive for settling in New England and the Middle Colonies, whereas economic opportunity was a primary factor in the settlement of the Southern Colonies. The Middle Colonies were settled largely by non-English Europeans, including Swedish, Dutch, and Germans, Swiss, French, Scottish, and Welsh.
- Despite their differences, people in all colonies were becoming increasingly discontent with British colonial rule and its various manifestations, especially taxation without representation. Other concerns included British regulation of trade, mandates to house and feed British military, and lack of due process of law (fair trials). It is this discontent with British rule that united the diverse colonies in a fight for independence from Britain.
- During the Revolutionary years, leaders from each colony joined together to a) claim independence from Britain and b) set up a unified government.

2. Investigating Life in Early America

This activity will introduce students to the work of historians by asking them to glean information about people in the past from artifacts they left behind. First, ask students if they know what an artifact is. Explain that an artifact is any object created by people, and that historians use artifacts to learn about life in the past. Discuss examples of artifacts in the classroom (e.g., book, desk, pencil, etc.) and what they might tell someone in the future about people's lives today.

Explain the difference between an observation and an interpretation. For example, you might observe that a book has writing inside. Then you might make the interpretation that a large number of books in the classroom might indicate that people do a lot of reading for information there. But this is not a proven fact based solely on the observation that there are books in the room. They could be used as booster seats! This is an important note about the work of historians—the stories they tell about the past include many interpretations based on observations of artifacts as well as other primary sources, which include actual accounts of the past from people who were there at the time. Even these accounts involve some interpretation from the person giving them, however. Of course the more evidence there is, the stronger the likelihood that interpretations are accurate.

Next, divide the class into two groups: the Ipswich, Massachusetts group and the Mill Creek, Delaware group. The Massachusetts group should investigate the Choate family at the Within These Walls Web site, available on the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of American History, through the EDSITEment-reviewed resource My History is America's History, and fill out the Historian's Questions worksheet, provided in pdf format, based on their investigation. The Delaware group should go investigate the Springer family at the Smithsonian Web site You Be the Historian and fill out the same worksheet.

Depending on how many computers you have available, you many need to use different configurations of students. If you have a computer lab available, all students can work at the same time. If you only have a few computers available, you can divide the class into groups of 3-5 students and rotate the groups at the computer while the other students work on another activity.

When not at the computer, students can do the following activity: Print out and distribute Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior, available through EDSITEment-reviewed resource The Papers of George

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Washington. Explain that this was a popular document used in schools at the time, and this version of the list was found copied into George Washington's notebook when he was about 16. Ask students to read the list and write a paragraph explaining what it tells you about the life of a colonial adolescent in the 1700s and another paragraph telling how his or her life might compare to theirs. (You may want to copy and paste the text into a new document for better printing.)

According to the American Treasures of the Library of Congress, available through EDSITEment-reviewed resource American Memory Collection:

> "A youthful George Washington copied out these 110 simple '*Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation*' as a school training exercise. This code of conduct is a simplified version of Francis Hawkins' *Youths Behavior, or Decency in Conversation Amongst Men*, which was based on a sixteenth-century set of rules compiled for young gentlemen by Jesuit instructors. Washington's handwriting, grammar, and spelling reflect his youth, and the 'Rules' reflect his strong desire to be a gentleman planter."

When students have completed their investigations, spend some time as a class discussing their findings.

3. Dear Cousin

In this activity, students write letters to each other from the perspectives of children in the Springer and Choate families. Tell students that they should imagine that the Springer and Choate families are cousins. Those who have studied the Springer family will identify themselves as one of their children and write a letter to a cousin in the Choate family. Those who have studied the Choate family will identify themselves as one of their children and write a letter to a cousin in the Springer family. Students should use all they have learned from their studies of the family's artifacts as well as other learning experiences about colonial life in America to write a letter that is authentic, although they are encouraged to use their imaginations to create realistic details.

Letters should follow standard friendly letter format and should include, at a minimum, the following components:

- A date (month, day, and year)
- A description of the child's day,
- A reference to at least one other member of the household,
- A reference to the setting (e.g., the season, the house, the community),
- An issue of concern,
- A source of excitement,
- At least two questions.

Letters should be distributed to members of the other group, so that each student receives one. If there is time, students should respond to the letters they receive, which will give them a chance to learn more about the other family and how their lives are both similar and different.

Finally, discuss as a group (or in small groups) how life in colonial America is both similar to and different from life in America today. Ask students to identify ways in which colonial pioneers influenced the way we live now. You can let the conversation flow naturally, or you can choose one or more themes to prompt focused discussion. Some possible themes to discuss might include the following:

- Freedom (religious, economic, political)
- Capitalism
- Individuality and independence

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- Democracy
- Innovation
- Racism
- Euro-centrism
- International trade
- Land ownership
- Power

Extending the Lesson

- Ask students to choose three artifacts from their own households. Then have each student write a paragraph about each explaining what it shows about the family's daily life and the historical period in which they live, geared at an audience of historians from 2100.
- Have students create and perform scenes from a day in the Springer family's life or a day in the Choate family's life.
- Have students draw or paint a picture of a scene at the Springer home or the Choate home.
- Send students to America's Library, available through the EDSITEment-reviewed resource American Memory Project (Library of Congress), and ask them to "Jump Back in Time" and explore the sections entitled "Colonial America" and "Revolutionary Period." Ask each student to find and read one story of interest about an individual who was important to American history. Then ask them to take on the persona of that individual and give a brief speech explaining why he or she is important to American history.

Selected EDSITEment Websites

- American Memory Project (Library of Congress) [http://memory.loc.gov/]
  - America's Library [http://www.americasstory.com/cgi-bin/page.cgi]
- American Studies at UVA [http://xroads.virginia.edu/]
  - Cultural Maps/American Historical Atlas [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MAP/map_hp.html]
  - Territorial Expansion /U.S. Territorial Maps [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MAP/terr_hp.html]
  - Colonial America [http://www.myhistory.org/historytopics/main_indexes/sub_indexes/historical/colonial.html]
- My History is America's History [http://www.myhistory.org/]
  - Resources [http://www.myhistory.org/resources/]
  - National and Regional Resources [http://www.myhistory.org/resources/resource_national.html]
  - Smithsonian Institution National Museum of American History [http://americanhistory.si.edu/]
  - Within These Walls [http://americanhistory.si.edu/house/default.asp]
  - Virtual Exhibitions [http://americanhistory.si.edu/ve/index.htm]
  - You Be the Historian [http://americanhistory.si.edu/hohr/springer/index.htm]
  - Not Just for Kids [http://americanhistory.si.edu/notkid/index.htm]
- National Geographic Society Xpeditions [http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/]
  - USA Map—1775 [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MAP/TERRITORY/1775map.html]

Other Information

Standards Alignment

1. NCSS-1

   Culture and cultural diversity. more

2. NCSS-10

   Civic ideals and practices. Citizenship in a democratic republic. more

3. NCSS-2

   Time, continuity, and change. The ways human beings view themselves in and over time. more

4. NCSS-3

   People, places, and environments. more

5. NCSS-4

   Individual development and identity. more

6. NCSS-5

   Individuals, groups, and institutions. more

7. NCSS-6

   Power, authority, and governance. more

8. NCSS-7

   Production, distribution, and consumption. more

9. NCSS-8

   Science, technology, and society. more

10. NCSS-9

    Global connections and interdependence. more

11. NCTE/IRA-1

    Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works. more

12. NCTE/IRA-10

    Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.

13. NCTE/IRA-11

    Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

14. NCTE/IRA-12

    Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information). more

15. NCTE/IRA-2

    Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience. more

16. NCTE/IRA-3

    Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. more

17. NCTE/IRA-4

    Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. more

18. NCTE/IRA-5

    Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. more

19. NCTE/IRA-6

    Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts. more

20. NCTE/IRA-7

    Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience. more

21. NCTE/IRA-8

    Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge. more

22. NCTE/IRA-9

    Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

23. NGS-1

    How to Use Maps and Other Geographic Representations, Tools, and Technologies to Acquire, Process, and Report Information from a Spatial Perspective

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24. NGS-10

    The Characteristics, Distribution, and Complexity of Earth's Cultural Mosaics

25. NGS-11

    The Patterns and Networks of Economic Interdependence on Earth's Surface

26. NGS-12

    The Processes, Patterns, and Functions of Human Settlement

27. NGS-13

    How the Forces of Cooperation and Conflict Among People Influence the Division and Control of Earth's Surface

28. NGS-14

    How Human Actions Modify the Physical Environment

29. NGS-15

    How Physical Systems Affect Human Systems

30. NGS-16

    The Changes That Occur in the Meaning, Use, Distribution, and Importance of Resources

31. NGS-17

    How to Apply Geography to Interpret the Past

32. NGS-2

    How to Use Mental Maps to Organize Information About People, Places, and Environments in a Spatial Context

33. NGS-3

    How to Analyze the Spatial Organization of People, Places, and Environments on Earth's Surface

34. NGS-4

    The Physical and Human Characteristics of Places

35. NGS-5

    That People Create Regions to Interpret Earth's Complexity

36. NGS-6

    How Culture and Experience Influence People's Perceptions of Places and Regions

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